

A Chittagong trade coin probably in the name of Amar Manikeya.

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Abstract:

Chittagong trade coins were invariably discovered to be struck in the name(s) of powerful individuals. In this regard, numismatists are perplexed by the person called Wamar or Vamar Shah on the trade coin. Based on numismatic and historical facts, this article assesses the probability that King Amar Manikeya of Tripura was the specific individual.

Keywords: Chittagong, Trade, Coin, Wamar, Tripura.

Introduction:

It has already been a long time since a coin in the name of Wamar Shah or Vamar Shah, possibly minted in Chittagong, was mentioned in articles by expert numismatists [Ref.-1, 2]. All of them considered it as a 'Chittagong trade coin.' Besides, a few of them speculated that the person named Wamar or Vamar could have been a governor appointed by the Arakan king [Ref.-3]. History does not provide a straightforward identity of this person.

According to numismatic records, the individual named Wamar Shah/Vamar Shah flourished during the late period of Bengal sultanates (about the 1570-80s AD). As all the Chittagong trade coins were struck in the name of an influential person, the person of interest should have been a potential one. In this respect, it is vital to comprehend the geopolitical context in Chittagong at that particular time by reviewing historical data from numerous sources. It is also critical to ensure that the individual's history data matches the numismatic data. The present article has tried to justify King Amar Manikeya of Tripura as the person engraved on the coin in light of historical and numismatic data.

Searching the correct pronunciation of the name inscribed on the coin:

Before digging deep, it is initially important to confirm the correct pronunciation of the engraved name mentioned on that coin. The Persian language was introduced in Bengal by the Afghan rulers. The Afghan Persian language is called 'Dari.' Phonetically, it is a little different from the classical Iranian Persian language. In Dari Persian, the Arabic/Persian consonant “ ڍ ” is pronounced bilabial and sounds like [wa]. On the contrary, in classical Iranian Persian, it is pronounced labiodental and sounds like [v] [Ref.-4]. The court of the Bengal sultan was likely using Afghan Persian, so the person whose name was engraved on the coin should be Wamar, not Vamar.

Re-visiting the history:

In 933 BE (1572 AD), Min Phalaung ascended to the throne of Arakan. 'Min Phalaung' (meaning 'Prince Portuguese/foreigner') was his honorific name since he was born in the year when his father, the great king of Arakan, Min Pa Gyi (Min Bin), defeated the foreign invader, the Portuguese. His birth name was Phwa Daw Htwe (meaning 'Royal Youngest Birth'), as he was the youngest son of Min Pa Gyi [Ref.-5]. His designation in the Muslim community was Sikander Shah-I. When Min Phalaung desired to expand his territorial supremacy, he first sent his eldest son, the crown prince, to attack the Ramu, the southern area of Chittagong. It happened in 936 BE (1575 AD) when Ramu was under the control of the Tripura king [Ref.-6]. In the Arakanese chronicle, Tripura and Ramu were titled as 'Thet' and 'Kamboja,' respectively. The crown prince defeated the ruler of Ramu. This successful expedition of Min Phalaung sent the message of his strength to the Pathan rulers of Chittagong and its surrounding territories. As a consequence, the Pathan ruler of Chittagong, Arakan chronicle termed him as 'U Sista,' and other Pathan rulers were subdued to Min Phalaung [Ref.-7]. Throughout the mediaeval period, the Bengal sultan, Tripura king, and Arakan king subjugated the Chittagong port city at various times. According to Arakan historian, Sandamala Lankara, 'Sista' is the Burmese corrupt of the Muslim name 'Jalal' (Jalal Khan). Mediaeval Chittagonian poet Muhammad Khan (who was alive in 1646 AD), in his hand written book (puthi) 'Maktul Hossain,' described the list of his ancestors, who were the early Muslim rulers in Chittagong [Ref.-8]. According to that depiction, Jalal Khan became the ruler of Chittagong following the death of his father, Nusrat Khan. After Jalal Khan, his son, Ibrahim Khan, became the ruler of Chittagong. Nusrat Khan was the ruler of Chittagong during the reign of Bengal Sultan Sulaiman Karrani. The Arakan chronicle mentioned Nusrat Khan as 'Nakhtha Tharu Khin'.

During the early time of the Tripura King, Udaya Manikya-I (reign 1567-72), the Bengal sultan Sulaiman Khan Karrani (reign 1565-72 AD) sent his troops against Tripura to capture Chittagong [Ref.-9]. The army

of Sulaiman Khan Karrani defeated Tripura and established the Sultan's hold over Chittagong. But Tripura's king did not give up his claim over Chittagong for long and continued to fight against the Bengal Sultan's army to regain its control over Chittagong. According to the Tripura chronicle, this battle lasted for around 5 years, and most of the time the Sultan's army was victorious. Now the important question is when Tripura regained control of Chittagong. In 1569 AD, a notable Venetian named 'Caesar Frederick' was visiting Chittagong and Sandwip [Ref.-10]. He stated in his travel diary that both the Chittagong and Sandwip were under the Bengal Sultan during his visit. If the battle between armies of Bengal Sultan and Tripura continued to the reign of Daud Khan Karrani (reign 1572-76 AD), the son of Sultan Sulaiman Khan Karrani, the hold of Bengal Sultan over Chittagong might become weak from 1574 AD because of the successful military campaigns by Mughal Emperor Akbar against him [Ref.-10]. This eventually might help Tripura to regain its supremacy over Chittagong. So the control of Chittagong might hand over to Tripura in between 1569 AD to 1574 AD.

During 1573 AD, Joy Manikeya-I (reign 1573-77 AD) was the king of Tripura [Ref.-12]. He was a puppet king in the hands of his army chief, Ranagan Narayan. Both Joy Manikeya-I and his father, Udaya Manikeya-I, were not members of the royal Manikeya dynasty. Udaya Manikeya-I (his previous name was Gopi Prasad) treacherously killed his earlier king, Ananta Manikeya, and ascended the throne of Tripura. Prince Amardeva, son of King Deva Manikeya, was an eligible contender for the kingship of Tripura. He, as an army commander, had been fighting against the Bengal sultan since the time of Udaya Manikeya-I and gained popularity in that frontier [Ref.-13]. The army chief of Joy Manikeya-I, Ranagan Narayan, was envious of Amardeva's popularity since he had a desire to be the next king. Out of his jealousy, he planned to kill Amardeva. But the plan failed. Subsequently, Amardeva sent his loyal troops against Ranagan Narayan and killed him. The murder of Ranagan Narayan displeased Joy Manikeya-I. Sensing the upcoming retaliation from Joy Manikeya-I, Amardeva marched against him in advance and assassinated him [Ref.-14]. It is assumed that this political turmoil in Tripura supported the Arakan king, Min Phalaung, in capturing the Ramu from Tripura. In 1477 Saka (1577 AD), Amardeva, as Amar Manikeya, took the throne of Tripura [Ref.-15].

Amar Manikeya proved his extraordinary kingship by expanding the territory of the Tripura kingdom. He turned areas situated in the northern and western borders of his kingdom—Sylhet, Bikrampur, Bhawal, Sarail, Bakla, Bhulua, etc.—into his vassal states [Ref.-16]. Amar Manikeya had an intimate relationship with Isha Khan, the potential leader of the 'Baro-Bhuiya' of Bhati regions. Both parties supported each other on various occasions [Ref.-17]. His close relationship with Isha Khan might have influenced other Pathan rulers of the Chittagong areas. The Arakan chronicle gave the sense that the rulers of areas that had previously been subdued to the Tripura monarch rose occasionally in rebellion against Min Phalaung due

to the influence of a certain individual [Ref.-18]. However, the Arakan chronicle did not mention his name. This person could have been the Amar Manikeya.

From 1580 AD, Min Phalaung had to remain busy repulsing the attack of the Toungoo king. However, in 1581 AD, the sudden death of the Toungoo king gave great relief to Min Phalaung as the invading army returned to their own country [Ref.-19]. After this, Min Phalaung took the initiative to establish his firm control over all of Chittagong situated in his western territory [Ref.-20]. During that time, all of Chittagong was divided into small feudal territories. Chittagong port and areas north of the Karnafully River formed Chittagong proper. According to the Tripura chronicle 'Rajmala', areas south of the Karnafully River were divided into 6 territories. Some of them were Rambu (Ramu), Chokria, Diang, and Uria (Ukhia). Min Phalaung appointed his second son, 'Thato Min Saw,' as the King of the West to look after the whole of Chittagong [Ref.-21]. This appointment displeased the feudal rulers of Chittagong. They rose against 'Thato Min Saw.' When Min Phalaung heard about this conspiracy, he became furious and vowed to punish them. To get rid of his anger, the ruler of Ramu and Chokoria, Adam fled and took shelter with Tripura king Amar Manikeya [Ref.-22, 23]. The northern ruler of Chittagong- Jalal Khan, neighbouring other Pathan rulers, and the Portuguese Captain in Chittagong allied with Amar Manikeya [Ref.-24]. This incident ultimately torched the battle between Arakan and Tripura. The Tripura army marched to Chittagong in advance, and they met the Arakan army near Ramu. Initially, the Tripura army was victorious over its counterpart. A ceasefire agreement was made between these two rival parties for one year. But the king of Arakan proceeded to Chittagong before the end of the ceasefire period and, in a letter, demanded the handover of Adam (former ruler of Ramu and Chokoria) to him. Amar Manikeya refused it. The Arakan chronicle mentioned the date as 948 BE (1586 AD) [Ref.-25]. As a consequence, these two rival parties again entered into a war. During that time the English traveler Ralph Fitch was in Chittagong and mentioned this war in his write-up [Ref.-26]. Finally, the Arakan Army defeated Tripura and eventually captured the Tripura capital, 'Udaipur' [Ref.-27]. This Arakan victory erased Tripura's hold over Chittagong forever.

Correlating history with numismatic data:

It is well recognised that all the Chittagong trade coins were minted in the name of person(s) having influence either on political or religious grounds. In these trade coins, except for Wamar Shah, other persons, even the local rulers like Jalal Khan and Adam Humayun, have been identified in the regional history. History revealed that at the early period of Udaya Manikeya-I, Bengal sultan Sulaiman Khan Karrani snatched control of Chittagong from Tripura. Thereafter, the Tripura army engaged in fighting against the sultan's army for 5 years to regain control of Chittagong. When the Mughal Emperor Akbar attacked the Bengal sultan, the firm grip of the Bengal sultan on Chittagong became loose, and ultimately

Tripura regained it. During the battle between Tripura and Bengal, Prince Amardeva (later, he became King Amar Manikeya) was the famous commandant of the Tripura army on the Chittagong front. His popularity made him a competent contender for Tripura's throne. After his ascension to the throne, Amar Manikeya extended Tripura's northern and western territories. He had a close relationship with Isha Khan, the well-known leader of the Baro Bhuiya of the Bhati regions. Even the Chittagong's Pathan ruler, who had been under Arakan control since 1575 AD, inclined towards King Amar Manikeya and supported him during the battle between Tripura and Arakan. Contemporary history cannot recognise any other prominent person named Wamar who had potential influence like King Amar Manikeya on Chittagong. It is also understandable that the name Amar can be pronounced as Wamar in Persian dialect.

Chittagong trade coins in the name of 'Wamar Shah' are extremely rare. It is considered that this variety of coins would have been minted in north Chittagong since its flan shape, style, calligraphy, and provenance resemble the other Chittagong-minted trade coins. The mint dates in so far collected coins of this ruler are 983 AH (1575), 984 AH (1576 AD), 985 AH (1577AD), 988 AH (1580 AD) and 989 AH (1581) [Figure 1]. Previously the coin dated 984 AH was read as 977 AH (retrograde); later numismatists confirmed the date as 984 AH. One of the important characteristics of Chittagong trade coins is that their mint dates are incompatible with the reign of the inscribed ruler. Many of Chittagong's trade coins have fictitious mint dates, either anticipatory or posthumous [Ref.-28]. For example, a trade coin of Jalal Shah, son of Muhammad Shah, has a mint date (951 AH) that is about 17 years anticipatory to his coronation (968 AH). In the case of Wamar Shah's coins, mint dates 983 AH and 984 AH can be considered anticipatory dates concerning the reign of Amar Manikeya. On the other hand, coins with mint dates 985 AH, 988 AH and 989 AH can be accepted as correct since they were minted during the reign of Amar Manikeya.

Some numismatists suggested that the Arakan king might appointed Wamar Shah as the governor of north Chittagong after Jalal Khan. However, history depicts that after Jalal Khan, his son, Ibrahim Khan became the governor of Chittagong. Besides, all the trade coins previously found with the inscriptions of Jalal Khan and Adam Humayun, the two rulers of Chittagong under the Arakan king, have no mint date. However, very recently two coins with a mint date of 992 AH have been found in the name of Adam Humayun, probably the only known two pieces in the whole world [Ref.-29]. Moreover, the early mint dates of Wamar Shah's coins make it unreasonable to place the Wamar as governor following Jalal Khan.

Interestingly, mint dates of some of Wamar Shah's coinage coincide with the mint dates of Sikander Shah's coinage (the Muslim name of Arakan King, Min Phalaung). Even though Chittagong had been subdued to the Arakan king since 1575 AD, the supremacy of the Arakan king on Chittagong was weak till 1581 AD. According to the Arakan chronicle, some Pathan rulers of Chittagong and surrounding areas occasionally revolted during these periods. When the threat of invasion by the Toungoo king on Arakan was over in

1581 AD, the Arakan king took the initiative to bring back Chittagong under his firm control. The simultaneous minting of Wamar's and Sikander's coinages may have indicated the 'swing political state' of Chittagong between the influences of Min Phalaung and Amar Manikeya from 1575 to 1581 AD. Remarkably, till now, no coin minted in the name of Wamar Shah was found after 1581 AD. Such connections between historical and numismatic evidence suggest that Amar Manikeya may be the Wamar Shah.

Conclusion:

Based on Afghan Persian, the court language of the Bengal Sultanate, it is possible to recognise correctly the name carved on the coin as 'Wamar' and rule out the option of 'Vamar'. Historical evidence from many sources narrates that, even though the Arakan king subdued Chittagong in 1575 AD, King Amar Manikeya of Tripura significantly influenced Chittagong throughout the 1570s and the middle of the 80s. This influence might have prompted the Pathan ruler of Chittagong to mint the trade coin in the name of Amar Manikeya. Persian dialect styled Amar Manikeya as 'Wamar Shah' on the coin.

Competing interests: The author declares no relevant conflicts of interest.

Funding: None


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|  | <p>983 AH. (1575 AD)</p> |
|  | <p>984 AH. (1576 AD)</p> |
|  | <p>985 AH. (1577 AD)</p> |
|  | <p>988 AH. (1580 AD)</p> |
|  | <p>989 AH. (1581 AD)</p> |

Figure 1: The collection includes coins named 'Wamar Shah,' each with a unique mint date. All photographs are courtesy of Noman Nasir.

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